

THE BOSWELLS AND THE CRAFT DUDLEY WRIGHT

Although the probabilities are in favour of the affirmative, it is yet a debatable question whether the great lexicographer, Dr. Samuel Johnson, was a member of the Craft or no, but there can be no doubt that his great biographer was not only a Freemason but that, in common with other members of his family, he held high office in the Grand Lodge of Scotland.

The name of Boswell first occurs in Scottish Masonic records in 1700, when, at a meeting of the Lodge of Edinburgh, held on 8th June, John Boswell, of Auchinleck, was present and attested the minute by his mark. It has been claimed that he, or his son, Thomas, was a Warden of this Lodge, but there is no evidence adducible in support of this statement.

It is also a fact, capable of easy proof, that the Laird of Auchinleck, the father of the famous biographer (born 1707), Senator of the College of Justice and Lord of Justiciary, 1756, was a member of the Lodge of Edinburgh; that his brother, John (born 1710), Doctor of Medicine, Censor and, for seven years, President of the Royal College of Physicians, Edinburgh, was Senior Grand Warden of the Grand Lodge of Scotland in 1753-54. At the Quarterly Communication of the Grand Lodge of Scotland, held in November, 1759, Grand Lodge having considered the report of its Standing Committee anent the French prisoners at present in the Castle of Edinburgh, recommended to Bro. Dr. John Boswell and others "to inquire into and inspect the condition and situation of these prisoners, particularly such of them as they shall find to be Freemasons and to report their opinion as to their number and necessity with their first convenience."

Grand Lodge, it may be stated, had previously voted ten guineas towards the relief of such prisoners in purchasing clothes and other necessaries for them "and particularly their brother Masons."

James Boswell, Johnson's biographer (born 1740), son and heir of the Scottish judge, the Laird of Auchinleck, himself also the well-known author of *Corsica*, was made an honorary member of the Lodge of Edinburgh, in February, 1777. He was an initiate of Canongate Kilwinning, of which, in due time, he became Master. He was, from 1776 to 1778, Deputy Grand Master of Scotland, having previously served the office of Senior Grand Warden, an office which is elective and not appointive.

The most famous Masonic member of the family, however, was James's son, Sir Alexander Boswell, who was born on 9th October, 1775, at the family mansion at Auchinleck, Ayrshire and named after his grandfather, the Laird of Auchinleck, the Scotch judge, who then lived there. He became Master of Mother Kilwinning on 21st December, 1820, an office which also carries with it the right to reign as Provincial Grand Master for Ayrshire. On the day of his election to the chair of Mother Kilwinning he composed and sang the following song, which he dedicated to the Lodge. He called the poem "The Mother Lodge, Kilwinning," and its metre enables it to be sung to the tune of "Bonnie Dundee"

Ye sons of Kilwinning, our Mother revered,
While memory lasts we shall honour her still;
And here in her hall, to each other endeared.
The warm Grip we'll give and the goblet we'll fill.

The cobwebs of life shaken hence from each frame,
Remember'd no more or remember'd with shame;
For here, ranged all round in Masonic array,
We'll celebrate gaily St. Thomas's day!

Though discord divide in the cankering round,
Still Friendship unites where the Temple has power
And sooner a Phoenix again shall be found,
Than one angry thought at this genial hour.

While virtue endures and fidelity lives
We'll cherish the blessings which Masonry gives;
And here, in its spirit and under its sway,
We'll celebrate gaily St. Thomas's day !

Alexander Boswell was the originator of the scheme for the erection of a monument on the banks of the Doon to the memory of Robert Burns and, in 1820, presided at the Masonic ceremony when its corner-stone was laid. Like many others who have set out with the laudable motive of doing honour to famous men and worthy causes, Alexander encountered much apathy when he set this scheme in motion. It had been arranged that the clerk of the county of Ayr should convene a public meeting to accord Burns this tribute. When the time appointed arrived only three people had put in an appearance-Boswell himself, the Rev. H. Paul, of Broughton (a zealous Mason) and the clerk. Boswell was in no way disconcerted or perturbed. He elected himself chairman, proposed the erection of the monument, declared the resolution and instructed the clerk, who was acting as secretary, to send out the subscription sheets. These were accorded a hearty reception and the monument was, in due course, erected. On the laying of the corner-stone, Boswell sang the following song, which he had composed for the occasion:

Vain thought! But had Burns witness'd a meeting
Of souls so congenial and warm'd with such fire,
The wild flow of fancy in ecstasy greeting,
Ah! what might have been the bold notes of his lyre!

As rays by reflection are doubled and doubled,
His bosom had swelled to your cheering reply;
Soft sympathy soothing the heart that was troubled
A smile for his mirth-for his sorrow a sigh.

Admir'd, but unaided, how dark was his story;
His struggles we know and his efforts we prize;
From murky neglect, as the flame bursts to glory,
He rose, self-embalm'd and destruction defies.

A ploughman he was: would that smiles of false favour
Had never decoy'd him from home and his team;
And taught all his hopes and his wishes to waver
And, snatching reality, left him-a dream.

To rank and to title, due deference owing,
We bow, as befitting society's plan;
But, judgment awaken'd and sympathy glowing,
We pass all distinctions and rest upon-man.

And from the poor hind, who, his day's task completed,
With industry's pride to his hovel returns,
To him who in royalty's splendour is seated,
If soul independent he found-'twas in Burns.

His birthright, his muse! Like the lark in the morning,
How blithely he caroll'd in praise of the fair;
With Nature enraptur'd and artifice scorning,
How sweet were his notes on the banks of the Ayr

And near to that spot where his kindred dust slumbers
And mark'd by the bard on the tablets of fame;
And near the thatch'd shed where he first lisp'd in numbers,
We'll raise a proud tribute to honour his name.

At a later stage in the proceedings Alexander Boswell gave another original song. He called it " To Anacreon in Heaven "

The glories of Masonry, who shall disclose?
Its pillars on earth but its arch the blue skies,
The sun, moon and ev'ry bright star as it glows,
Are emblems to us, as they set and arise.
Though neutrals may stare
At the compass and square,
To Masons they rectitude they plainly declare;
And though in our Lodge like true brothers confin'd.
Our souls know no limits in love to mankind.

The pure word of Him who gave life to us all,
Bade one erring mortal another to aid ;
But while holy Masonry rests on our Ball,
The three hallow'd maxims here never shall fade.
The union how blest

Which, through trial and test,
Makes brotherly love in each bosom a guest!
And the vile selfish dross, by the flame that is giv'n,
Purg'd clear from our hearts brings us nearer to heav'n.

Ye sons of St. Andrew, our tutelar saint,
In proud emulation your duty pursue ;
The cross ye can bear neither weary nor faint;
For what a man should do, a Scotsman can do.
Then true to each other,
Let each loyal brother
The first germ of wrath in benevolence smother
And blending philanthropy, mirth, song and wine,
Accepted and free be your banquet divine.

As Provincial Grand Master for Ayrshire, he convened a meeting of that sub-jurisdiction in August, 1821, for the purpose of drawing up and presenting to King George IV, patron of the Order, a letter assuring him of their faithful and loyal attachment and wishing him a long and prosperous reign. On that occasion he sang the following song of his own composition:

Here below in a vale of Trial,
Immers'd in folly and rash and weak,
Clouds incumbering Reason's Dial,
We're wreck'd in sorrow when joy we seek.

Lone and unheeded, 'midst vexation,
How low were Thy lot, Creation's Lord,
Did no friend, for consolation,
Enliven Thy heart with the Mason's Word?

While the world, in toil and trouble,
Are bustling busy, here and there,
Let the wretch his thousands double,
He'll find he sooner can double care.

But if a man of soul elastic,
The dross can despise for ore divine;
Firm, true, warm, enthusiastic,
We'll welcome that man with the Mason's Sign.

Masons here hand and heart united,
In conclave seated, our cares beguile;
The cold be warm'd, the warm'd delighted
And glowing harmony lend her smile.

And while in laugh and song we revel
And lift the full goblet to the lip,

Rul'd by compass, square and level,
We'll pledge all round with the Mason's Grip.

Short our Span! Ah, shorter the Season,
While fire and fancy in vigour sway.
Led by Virtue and control'd by Reason,
The trusty Mason must toil his day.

Like the proud Temple, we, too, must moulder,
Yet while there's Life, let's work to the plan;
And o'er each green sod each sad beholder
Shall sigh for the Mason and honour the Man.

In August, 1821, he was created a Baronet and, on the 21st of December following, as Provincial Grand Master, he consecrated Lodge Blair at Dalry, when, at the banquet which followed, he sang the following song, which he had composed for the occasion, which, according to the Minutes, "none elicited such shouts of applause."

Our mither's got anither wean,
A dainty wean-a sonsie wean;
Our mither's got anither wean,
Sae push about the whisky.

Blair o' Blair its daddy is,
For " Blair Dalry " maun sure be his
He'll warm your hearts, lads, till they bizz,
When sloken'd wi' guid whisky.

Here honest men together meet,
Their brows to smooth, their mous to weet;
And friendship's fire to stir and beat,
Sae push about the whisky.

The compass, square, the maul and a',
Still keep us right and gie the law;
But fient a pillar e'er need fa'.
For just a wee drap whisky.

Auld Babel didna mak folk dum'.
Sae while a Mason can sit plum,
Let care wi' reek gie up the lum,
Sac push about the whisky.

Our mither's got anither wean.
A dainty wean-a sonsie wean;
Our mither's got anither wean
An here's her health in whisky.

On the following day he presided at the anniversary meeting of Lodge Mother Kilwinning and that is his last recorded Masonic appearance. In the following year he was killed in a duel, a quarrel not of his own seeking and one in which he refused to participate, shooting in the air, as he had announced his intention of doing. He could have escaped the consequences, according to the code of "honour," had he broken a vow to secrecy which he had taken. Paralysis set in as the result of the wound he received and, to the great loss of Masonry and the sorrow of his friends, he passed away. Robert Howie Smith, in his "Memoir," says

As a Brother of the Mystic Tie he entered fully into the spirit of a pastime, not the least recommendation of which is its relentless exorcism of everything approaching to the claims of caste. And this allusion is a reminder that, Masonically, his reputation was as high as his rank in the Craft -the one not infrequently being in the inverse ratio of the other, seeing that honour and office do not always go hand in hand. For years he adorned more than one throne in the Province, by his dignity and firmness, heading several important demonstrations and materially advancing the best interests of the Fraternity. He was also their standing poet-laureate-an honorary post which he held for the district and for Burns' Clubs and for scientific societies all over the kingdom.

His father, James Boswell, lived from 1786 to 1788 at 55 and 56, Great Queen Street, a double house afterwards absorbed in the buildings of Freemasons' Hall, but now pulled down to make way for the new Masonic Peace Memorial. It was here, undoubtedly, that he wrote part of his famous Life of Samuel Johnson. When Grand Lodge rebuilt the structure it presented portions of the facade and the staircase to the London County Council for preservation in the Geffrye Museum, Kingsland Road. It was not found possible to repair and preserve the building in situ owing to the fact that the brickwork and piers supporting the structure were decayed and cracked, that dry rot was prevalent in the timbers of the roof and that the front wall was out of plumb. Among the previous residents of the house were the two first Earls of Bristol, Thomas Fairfax (Cromwell's commander-in-chief), the third Earl of Devonshire; the second Earl of Sunderland; the seventh Duke of Norfolk; while, for a time, it was also the residence of Richard Brinsley Sheridan.

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